

Suriname (Tier 2)

The Government of Suriname does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Suriname remained on Tier 2. These efforts included adopting a formal victim referral process, renovating a dedicated shelter for trafficking victims, finalizing a new annual national action plan (NAP), and increasing screening for trafficking indicators during labor inspections. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Authorities investigated fewer cases, initiated no prosecutions for the third year in a row, did not convict any traffickers, and did not consistently screen vulnerable individuals for trafficking indicators.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Train and support all officials in contact with vulnerable individuals to implement the victim identification and referral protocol to identify trafficking victims, especially among temporary workers from Cuba and among children and migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Venezuela, and other countries. • Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, convict, and sentence traffickers, including officials complicit in sex or labor trafficking. • Provide vulnerable individuals with trauma-informed assistance, reintegration support, and interpretation in their language prior to, during, and after screening for trafficking. • Train judges at all levels of the judiciary in human trafficking and the trafficking law and sensitize judges and prosecutors to the issue of secondary trauma. • Prosecute child sex and labor trafficking cases under the trafficking statute and provide specialized child protection services with trained providers. • Conduct trauma-informed training for police and labor inspectors and hire enough staff to conduct targeted inspections in urban, remote interior, and off-coast fishing locations where trafficking is most likely to occur. • Provide additional resources to the Police Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Unit. • Build the capacity of and collaborate with NGOs to increase outreach to potential trafficking victims among vulnerable groups. • Develop and execute a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for anti-trafficking policies and efforts and publish the results.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained prosecution efforts. Article 334 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to

nine years' imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 Surinamese dollars (SRD) (\$7,000) for offenses involving a victim 16 years of age or older, and up to 12 years' imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 SRD (\$7,000) for those involving a victim under the age of 16. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape.

Police reported initiating six investigations (four for sex trafficking and two for labor trafficking), compared with eight investigations in 2019, three in 2018, and 10 in 2017. Police referred one sex trafficking case involving a Surinamese victim for prosecution but later dropped the case due to insufficient evidence; the victim also chose not to cooperate with the prosecution. Following investigations, authorities referred two trafficking investigations for prosecution as other crimes. Police continued to investigate another sex trafficking case at the end of the reporting period. Police investigated a fishing company for forced labor and a hotel for labor trafficking; no labor trafficking was identified in either case.

The prosecutor's office did not initiate any new trafficking prosecutions during the reporting period and has not initiated any prosecutions since 2017. The government did not report any convictions for human trafficking in 2020, compared with 18 in 2019, seven in 2018, and three in 2017. The government did not report the status of four pending prosecutions involving 12 suspected traffickers initiated in previous years. The government did not report any new investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in trafficking offenses. The president noted in a speech in March 2021 in the National Assembly that the government would punish civil servants who were complicit in human trafficking, specifically those caught selling residency permits to organizations guilty of human trafficking, as well as those assisting these organizations when people enter the country. He further called on police and justice officials to intensify trafficking investigations and prosecutions generally.

The 13-person Police TIP Unit was the sole agency responsible for the investigation of sex trafficking, forced labor, and migrant smuggling cases throughout the country. The Police Youth Affairs Department also investigated any case involving persons younger than 18; the government reported the two units collaborated closely. During the reporting period, the Police TIP Unit determined one case initially investigated as trafficking was in fact a case of sexual abuse and referred it to the Police Youth Affairs Department. The TIP Unit referred trafficking investigations to prosecutors trained in human trafficking. The prosecutor's office had no prosecutors working solely on trafficking cases, and

there were no courts specifically dedicated to human trafficking. The anti-trafficking funding for these bodies was part of their overall budgets. The TIP Unit consistently lacked sufficient funding, staffing, and other resources—including transport—to adequately investigate human trafficking cases. There were no operations in the interior of the country during the reporting period, although the permanently-manned checkpoints strategically located across the country on roads leading to the interior—set up in prior reporting periods as an alternative to expensive one-off raids—continued to function. Authorities were considering additional checkpoints at the end of the reporting period.

The pandemic significantly impacted the government's efforts to coordinate, execute, and monitor its anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. Illegal movement across the eastern, western, and southern borders continued, despite pandemic-related border closures. The TIP Unit adapted operations to health protocols but could not monitor establishments that closed as a result of the pandemic. The TIP Unit faced staffing shortages as some of its staff tested positive for COVID-19. Courts heard only time-sensitive cases during a pandemic-related shutdown and continued to have a large backlog of cases, including trafficking cases—a situation exacerbated by the pandemic. The Ministry of Justice and Police, in cooperation with an international organization, initiated a project to provide technical assistance, including on human trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government maintained protection efforts. The government identified one victim during the reporting period, compared with identifying three victims in 2019. The government reported the victim declined government assistance. The Trafficking in Persons Working Group approved and partially implemented the First Response to the Victim of Trafficking in Persons Protocol, which outlines procedures for interacting with potential trafficking victims. The Police TIP Unit used the protocol during the reporting period, but the pandemic hampered its implementation and use by other care providers and first responders. Experts reported the government did not effectively identify victims among children, migrants in the interior, and in brothels emerging in private homes. In March 2020, authorities signed a special agreement with Cuba to allow 120 Cuban medical workers to help combat the pandemic; 51 Cubans came to the country during the reporting period, joining approximately 50 already in the country. Reports indicated the Cuban medical workers may have been exploited in forced labor; the government reported it did not screen the workers for trafficking indicators. The government reported partnering with an international organization to screen close

to 500 migrants, predominantly Cubans, at the closed border with Guyana; authorities did not identify any trafficking victims. There were no reported cases of Suriname nationals exploited abroad.

No NGOs in the country specifically worked on human trafficking, although an international organization and other NGOs included trafficking victim protection in their activities. In March 2021, the president called for greater access to police and justice services for trafficking victims and for specialized training for counselors and shelter staff to provide support to victims, emphasizing the need to focus on community reintegration; he also directed border authorities to improve their screening of people entering the country to identify possible victims. The Ministry of Justice and Police used a referral process by which they moved victims to the Bureau of Victim Services for shelter, medical care, counseling, and other care funded out of their regular budget. The Bureau of Legal Aid could provide victims with legal assistance, if necessary. Under the new protocol, the government offered these services to potential victims upon first encounter with them. The government did not place time limits or conditions upon services, except for shelter; authorities did not require victim cooperation with law enforcement to receive care. The government continued to make available minimum quality services during the pandemic and offered them to foreign and domestic victims and those with disabilities. The government funded and operated a trafficking shelter for women and children; it was in the same complex as a shelter for victims of domestic violence. During the reporting period, the government completed physical renovations to the trafficking shelter to improve its functionality in serving victims. The trafficking shelter was the only facility the government had available for human trafficking victims. The government did not report any victims used the shelter during the reporting period. Previous efforts to place child trafficking victims in a shelter for abused children were not successful. Children who did not want to return to their homes had the option of entering a childcare facility or staying with a foster family. Special counseling was available for child victims, along with their families. Victims were free to leave the shelter, but only with a chaperone. The government reported being willing to assist foreign victims to apply for temporary or permanent residency and a work permit, but there were no longer term shelter options available for foreign victims. Victims could apply for temporary or permanent residency whether or not they assisted with trials, although there are no reported cases of victims using either of these provisions. Victim-witnesses could obtain employment, move freely within the country, or travel abroad. There was no witness protection program, although victims in shelters received police protection. Courts could obtain testimony from victims in the early stages of judicial investigations in case victims were not available during

the trial process, although this could weaken testimony in cases where victims were not given time for rehabilitation before providing testimony. In the case of foreign victims, prosecutors usually used a victim's initial report as testimony in the case, as victims often returned to their countries of origin before a trial was completed; in almost all cases, courts lost contact with the victim once the victim departed the country. However, victims continued to have the right to testify after providing an initial statement and/or after receiving counseling. The defense attorney continued to have the right to question the victim. Testimony via video or written statements was possible. Victims had the right to seek restitution through a civil process, though no such case has ever been filed.

Vulnerable individuals who violated the terms of their stay could be deported before being screened for trafficking, but the government reported it stopped deportations as part of its pandemic response measures unless the deportation involved persons suspected of committing a crime apart from having an irregular status, upon which the government deported the person on immigration violations without a separate criminal process. The government reported immigration status was not cause for deportation during the reporting period. The government reported it did not knowingly detain, fine, or jail potential trafficking victims for crimes their traffickers forced them to commit. In the previous reporting period, outside organizations reported the government jailed human trafficking victims under the Alien Act for having been in the country illegally after being referred to the TIP Unit for assistance; no such cases were reported during this reporting period.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The government adopted a new annual NAP for 2020-2021, which designated the TIP Working Group as the primary interdepartmental group responsible for monitoring and implementing the NAP, coordinating government efforts to combat trafficking, and making recommendations to the government, including on legislation. The TIP Working Group, coordinated by the Director of Operations of the Ministry of Justice and Police, composed of representatives of the police, prosecutor's office, and Ministries of Justice and Police, Defense (immigration), Labor, Foreign Affairs, and Social Affairs, and reported to the Minister of Justice and Police on the effectiveness of the NAP and addressed emerging issues on a whole of government basis. The incoming government terminated the TIP Working Group's mandate in July 2020 and did not formally restore it until November 2020; however, the members of the TIP Working Group remained active in coordinating efforts,

including drafting the NAP. The main priorities of the plan were to strengthen security at the borders, raise awareness of criminal activities related to trafficking, create a victim identification procedure, promote safe return of victims to their country of origin, and provide adequate medical treatment and shelter to victims with legal status. The government did not seek input from survivors or NGOs in drafting the NAP. The government allocated 2.4 million SRD (\$167,950) in 2020 to the agencies that combat trafficking, although that amount was not specifically allocated for trafficking. Despite the pandemic and a severe economic crisis, the government reported it did not divert financial resources from human trafficking, but placed implementation of the plan on hold because of the pandemic. Authorities struggled to compile data due to pandemic-related travel restrictions and delays.

The government continued to operate a 24-hour anti-trafficking hotline in the interagency National Command Center. The hotline primarily operated in Dutch, English, and Sranan Tongo. The government made informational flyers and brochures in different languages with the anti-trafficking hotline number and posted the flyers at multiple entry points, police stations, doctors' offices, and other locations. The government halted other awareness campaign activities because of the pandemic. The government did not conduct research on trafficking during the reporting period. The government did not publicly post an assessment of its anti-trafficking efforts but made the information available upon request.

Labor laws prohibited employers, recruiters, and labor agents from charging workers recruitment fees, confiscating workers' passports or travel documents, switching contracts without workers' consent, or withholding wages as a means of keeping workers in a state of compelled service. Labor laws required all employment agencies to be licensed before recruiting domestic and foreign employees, and they had to receive permission from the Ministry of Labor before entering into work mediation with employees. The Labor Inspectorate under the Ministry of Labor increased its staffing from 50 to 70 people and appointed a new head as part of its reorganization. The government assigned the Labor Inspectorate as the lead agency responsible for overseeing the implementation of pandemic protocols in different business sectors, which significantly increased its reach to conduct regular inspections; however, the government did not provide sufficient funding, staffing, or equipment to cover all tasks. Most inspections were unannounced, but the law did not allow labor inspectors to inspect private homes or farms, and police had to be escorted and have a special warrant for any inspections on private property. The government reported fining businesses up to 250 SRD (\$17.50) for each foreign worker employed without having the proper

registration paperwork. Labor inspectors also screened for indicators of human trafficking but did not report identifying any labor trafficking cases through such measures among its increased inspections during the reporting period. No inspectors were solely dedicated to child labor, but the government trained all inspectors to identify child labor and instructed them how to handle suspected cases, with the Labor Inspectorate required to report alleged cases of child labor and forced labor to the police within 45 minutes. The government warned businesses against hiring foreign workers without proper documentation and provided information on employment scams and fraudulent job offerings to businesses and workers through print and social media and on television, including public service announcements with contact information for questions or concerns. Authorities also could accept information on labor violations reported by the public. Migrant workers could not enter and exit the country, except for repatriation, after the borders closed in March 2020. The government only allowed repatriation flights between the United States, Netherlands, Cuba, Haiti, and Dominican Republic, along with occasional charter flights to Aruba and Brazil. Foreigners who were in the country when the borders closed and could not repatriate could register, have their stay permits extended, and work temporarily. The government provided this service to persons who entered the country legally, but overstayed, and whose stay permit expired before the borders were closed. Limited unemployment benefits only went to citizens. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government did not make efforts to reduce participation in international and domestic child sex tourism.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Suriname, and traffickers exploit victims from Suriname abroad. Reported cases of trafficking in Suriname's remote jungle interior, which constitutes approximately 80 percent of the country, have increased in recent years; limited government presence in the interior renders the full scope of the problem unknown. Weak immigration policies, difficulty controlling Suriname's borders, and the draw of the gold and timber trade have led to an influx of immigrants from different countries entering Suriname legally and remaining in country after their legal stay expired. These persons become particularly vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking. Traffickers target the increasing influx of migrants into Suriname, particularly those from Haiti and Venezuela, as well as those from Brazil, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Guyana. Migrant women and girls are especially at risk for sex trafficking in Suriname, including in brothels, massage parlors and hair

salons, and illegal gold mining camps in Suriname's interior. Individuals involved in commercial sex offered through newspaper ads and social media are also at risk for trafficking. Adult and child migrant workers in agriculture, retail shops, construction, and on fishing boats off Suriname's coast are at risk of trafficking, as are children working in agriculture, small construction, gold mines, and informal urban sectors. Given their irregular status, migrant groups avoid seeking assistance from the authorities for fear of criminalization or deportation, making them vulnerable to traffickers. Chinese associations, and allegedly some Hong Kong traffickers, recruit and exploit Chinese immigrants in sex and labor trafficking in the mining, service, and construction sectors. Surinamese women in neighboring countries are at risk of sex trafficking. Some Surinamese parents exploit their daughters in sex trafficking. Traffickers may transport victims through routes in Suriname's interior that bypass official checkpoints. There are reports of corruption and local official complicity in trafficking crimes that may impede anti-trafficking efforts. While traffickers are predominantly male, authorities have prosecuted and convicted women for human trafficking. Traffickers may exploit victims from the same migrant populations. The pandemic exacerbated trafficking risks as individuals engaged in commercial sex began to do so in private homes or more poorly protected clubs in the interior, making them vulnerable to trafficking. Organizations representing the HIV positive and LGBTQI+ communities also reported these groups became particularly vulnerable as they faced increased poverty.